

The Mystery of the Boule Cabinet

By BURTON E. STEVENSON

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"It seems to be pretty much up against it," he said, "no doubt just as the designer of the cabinet would wish me to be. The whole bottom of the desk is inclosed, and those three little drawers take up only a small part of the space. Then the back of the cabinet seems to be double—at least, there's a space of three inches I can't account for. So there's room for a dozen secret drawers, if the Montezuma required so many. And now to find the combination."

He adjusted the steel gauntlet carefully to his right hand and sat down on the floor before the cabinet.

"I'll begin at the bottom," he said. "If there is any spot I miss, tell me of it."

He ran his fingers up and down the graceful legs, carefully feeling every inequality of the elaborate bronze ornamentation. Then he examined the bottom of the table minutely, using his torch to illumine every crevice, but again without result.

Another half hour passed so, and when at last he came out from under the table his face was dripping with sweat.

"It's trying work," he said, sitting down again and mopping his face.

"But isn't it a beauty, Lester? The more I look at it the more wonderful it seems."

"I'd point out one thing to you, Godfrey," I said. "If you go on poking about with the fingers of both hands, as you've been doing, you are just as apt to get struck on the left hand as on the right."

"That's true," he agreed. "Stop me if I forget."

There were three little drawers in the front of the table and these Godfrey had removed. He inserted his hand into the space from which he had taken them and examined it carefully. Then, inch by inch, he ran his fingers over the bosses and arabesques with which the sides and top of the table were incrustated. It seemed to me that if the secret drawer were anywhere it must be somewhere in this part of the cabinet, and I watched him with breathless interest. But no hidden spring was touched; no drawer sprang open; no poisoned fangs descended.

"Well," said Godfrey, sitting back in his chair at last and wiping his face again, "now we'll try the upper part."

"The upper part of the cabinet consisted of a series of drawers, rising one above the other and terminated by a triangular pediment, its tympanum ornamented with some beautiful little bronzes. The drawers themselves were concealed by two doors, opening in the center and covered with a most intricate design of arabesque incrustations."

"If there is a secret drawer here," said Godfrey, "it is somewhere in the back, where there seems to be a hollow space. But to discover the combination—"

He ran his fingers over the inlay, and then, struck by a sudden thought, tested each of the little figures along the tympanum, but they were all set solidly in place.

"There's one thing sure," he said, "the combination, whatever it is, is of such a nature that it could not be discovered accidentally. It is probably a question of releasing a series of levers, which must be worked in a certain order or the drawer won't open. I'm afraid we are up against it."

"I can't pretend I'm sorry," I said with a sigh of relief. "As far as I am concerned, I'm perfectly willing that the drawer should go undiscovered."

I don't know what it was, for I was conscious of no noise, but some mysterious attraction drew my eyes to the window at the farther side of the room. Near the top of the wooden shutter, which Parks and I had put in place, was a small semi-circular opening, to allow the passage of a little light, perhaps, and peering through this opening were two eyes—two burning eyes.

They were fixed upon Godfrey, who was now examining the back of the cabinet, with such feverish intensity that they did not see my glance, and I lowered my head instantly.

"Godfrey," I said in a shaking voice, "don't look up, don't move your head, but there is some one peering through the hole in the shutter opposite us."

with this while he is out there. Even if we found the drawer we'd both be dead an instant later."

"You mean he'd kill us?"

"He would shoot us instantly. Imagine what a sensation that would make. Lester. Parks hears two pistol shots, rushes in and finds us lying here dead. Grady would have a convulsion, and we should both be famous for a few days."

"I'll seek fame in some other way," I said dryly. "What are you going to do about it?"

"We've got to try to capture him, and if we do—well, we shall have the fame all right! But it's a good deal like trying to pick up a scorpion—we're pretty sure to get hurt. If that fellow out there is who I think he is he's about the most dangerous man on earth."

He went on tapping the surface of the cabinet.

"Why can't I go out as though I were going after something?" I suggested.

"Then Parks and I could charge around the corner and get him."

"You wouldn't get him; he'd get you. You wouldn't have a chance on earth."

I couldn't help it. I glanced again at the window.

"He's gone!" I cried. Godfrey was at the window in two steps.

"Look at that," he said, "and then tell me he isn't a genius!"

I followed the direction of his pointing finger and saw that just opposite the opening in the shutter a little hole had been cut in the window pane.

"That fellow foresees everything," said Godfrey, with enthusiasm. "He probably cut that hole as soon as it was dark. He must have guessed we were going to examine the cabinet tonight, and he wanted not only to see, but to hear. He heard everything we said, Lester!"

"Let's go after him!" I cried. And without waiting for an answer I sprang across the anteroom and snatched open the door which led into the hall.

"There is some one peering through the hole."

Parks and Rogers were sitting on the couch just outside.

"There's a man outside. Got your pistol, Parks?" I cried.

"Yes, sir." And he took it from his pocket.

I snatched it from him, opened the front door, leaped the railing and stole along the house to the corner.

Then, taking my courage in both hands, I charged around it.

There was no one in sight, but from somewhere near at hand came a burst of mocking laughter.

CHAPTER VIII. A Distinguished Caller.

GODFREY and I examined the windowsill and the ground beneath it when I returned from my fruitless chase. "There is where he stood," he said, and the marks on the sill were evident enough.

We went slowly back to the house and Godfrey sat down again to a contemplation of the cabinet.

"It's too much for me," he said at last. "The only way I can find that drawer, I'm afraid, is with an ax. I'm going to look up the subject of secret drawers—perhaps I'll stumble upon something that will help me."

"And then, of course," I said disconsolately, "it is quite possible that there isn't any such drawer at all."

But Godfrey shook his head decidedly.

half afraid of him!"

"I'm wholly afraid of him if he's who I think he is. But it's a mere guess as yet, Lester. Wait a day or two. I'll call up Simmonds."

He went to the phone, while I sat down again and looked at the cabinet in a kind of stupefaction. Godfrey came back while I was still groping blindly amid this maze of mystery.

"It's all right," he said. "Simmonds is sending two of his best men to watch the house. He stood for a moment gazing down at the cabinet. 'I'm coming back tomorrow to have another try at it,' he added. 'I have left the gauntlet there on the chair, so if you feel like having a try yourself, Lester.'"

"Heaven forbid!" I protested. "But perhaps I would better tell Parks to let you in. I hope I won't find you a corpse here, Godfrey!"

"So do I. But I don't believe you will. Yes, tell Parks to let me in whenever I come around. And now about Rogers."

"What about him?"

"I rather thought I might want to grill him tonight. But perhaps I would better wait till I get a little more to go on." He paused for a moment's thought. "Yes, I'll wait," he said finally. "I don't want to run any risk of failing."

We went out into the hall together, and I told Parks to admit Godfrey whenever he wished to enter. Rogers was still sitting on the cot, looking so crushed and sorrowful that I could not help pitying him. I said so to Godfrey as we went down the front steps.

"Perhaps you're right," he agreed. "Something has happened to him—something in connection with that woman—and he has never got over it. Well, we shall have to find out what it was. Hello! Here are Simmonds' men," he added as two policemen stopped before the house.

"Is this Mr. Godfrey?" one of them asked.

"Yes," said Godfrey. "Mr. Simmonds told us to report to you, sir, if you were here."

"What we want you to do," said Godfrey, "is to watch the house—watch it from all sides—patrol clear around it and see that no one approaches it."

"Very well, sir." And the men touched their helmets.

"Perhaps if they concealed themselves," I suggested, "the fellow might venture back and be nabbed."

But Godfrey shook his head.

"I don't want him to venture back," he said. "I want to scare him off. I want him to see we're thoroughly on guard." He hailed a passing cab and paused with one foot on the step.

"I've already told you, Lester," he added over his shoulder, "that I'm afraid of him. Perhaps you thought I was joking, but I wasn't. I was never more serious in my life. The Record office," he added to the cabbie and jingled away, leaving me staring after him.

Just before I turned in for the night in my own apartment I heard from Godfrey again, for my telephone rang, and it was his voice that answered.

"I just wanted to tell you, Lester," he said, "that your guess was right. The mysterious Frenchman came over on La Touraine, landing at noon yesterday. He came in the steerage and the stewards know nothing about him. What time was it he got to Vantine's?"

"About 2 I should say."

"So he probably went directly there from the boat, as you thought. That accounts for nobody knowing him. The steamship company is holding a bag belonging to him. I'll get them to open it tomorrow and perhaps we shall find out who he was. Good night!"

It was shortly after I reached the office next morning that the office boy came in and handed me a card with an awed and reverent air. An awed and reverent feeling crept over me also, for the card bore the name of Sereno Hornblower.

That name is quite unknown outside the legal profession of the three great cities of the east—New York, Boston and Philadelphia—yet Sereno Hornblower's income would make that of any other lawyer in the country look like 30 cents.

He is the confidential attorney of most of our "best families." He has held that position for years, and it is said that no case placed unreservedly in his hands ever resulted in a public scandal.

His reputation for tact and delicacy is tremendous, and yet those who have found themselves opposed to him have never been long in realizing that there was a most redoubtable mallet flat under the velvet glove. I had never met him either professionally or personally, and it was with some eagerness that I told the office boy to show him in at once.

He was a bluff and hearty man of middle age, rather heavy set, fresh faced and clean shaven and with very bright blue eyes.

We shook hands and he sat down and plunged at once without an instant's hesitation into the business which had brought him.

"Mr. Lester," he began, "I understand that you are the administrator of the estate of the late Philip Vantine?"

whom, for the present, we will call Mme. X."

The thought flashed through my mind that Mme. X. and the mysterious Frenchman might be one and the same person. Then I put aside the idea as absurd. Sereno Hornblower would never accept such a client.

"Mr. Vantine did buy such a cabinet," I said.

"And it is in your possession?"

"There is at his residence a Boule cabinet which was shipped him from Paris, but only a few hours before his death. Mr. Vantine assured me that it was not the one he had purchased."

"You mean that a mistake had been made in the shipment?"

"That is what we supposed, and a cablegram from Armand & Son has since confirmed it."

"Where is the cabinet which Mr. Vantine did buy?"

"I have no idea. Perhaps it is still in Paris. But I am expecting a representative of the Armands to call very soon to straighten things out."

Again my companion fell silent, and sat rubbing his chin absently.

"It is very strange," he said finally. "If the cabinet was still at Paris, one would think it would have been discovered before my client made inquiry about it."

"There are a good many things which are strange about this whole matter," I supplemented.

"Would you have any objection to my client seeing this cabinet, Mr. Lester?"

It was my turn to hesitate.

"Mr. Hornblower," I said finally, "I will be frank with you. There is a certain mystery surrounding this cabinet which we have not been able to solve. I suppose you have read of the mysterious deaths of Mr. Vantine and of an unknown Frenchman, both in the same room at the Vantine house and both apparently from the same cause?"

"Do you mean that this cabinet is connected with them in any way?" he asked quickly.

"We believe so, though as yet we have been able to prove absolutely nothing. But we are guarding the cabinet very closely. I should not object to your client seeing it, but I could not permit her to touch it—not, at least, without knowing why she wished to do so. You will remember that you have told me nothing of why she is interested in it."

"I am quite ready to tell you the story, Mr. Lester," he said. "It is only fair that I should do so. After you have heard it, if you agree, we will take Mme. X. to see the cabinet. My client is a member of a prominent American family—a most prominent family. Three years ago she married a French nobleman. You can perhaps guess her name, but I should prefer that neither of us utter it."

"This nobleman has been both prodigal and unfaithful. He has scattered my client's fortune with both hands. I am free to confess that I consider her a fool not to have left him long ago. At last her trustees interfered, for her father had been wise enough to place a portion of his fortune in trust. They paid her husband's debts, placed him on an allowance and notified his creditors that his debts would not be paid again."

I had by this time, of course, guessed the name of his client.

"The allowance is a princely one," Mr. Hornblower continued, "but it does not suffice Monsieur X. No allowance would suffice him. So he has become a thief. He has taken to selling the objects of art with which his residences are filled and which are really the property of my client, since they were purchased with her money. About two weeks ago my client returned to Paris from a stay at her chateau in Normandy to find that he had almost denuded the town house. Among other things which he had taken was a Boule cabinet, which had been used by my client as her private writing desk. The cabinet was a most valuable one. But it is not its monetary value which makes my client so anxious to recover it."

He paused an instant and cleared his throat.

"Monsieur X. had had the decency," he went on, more slowly, "to, as he thought, retain his wife's private papers. He had caused the contents of the various drawers to be dumped out upon a chair. But there was one drawer of which he knew nothing—a secret drawer, known only to my client. That drawer contained a packet of letters which my client is most anxious to regain. She has given me to understand that their recovery is essential to her peace of mind."

I reflected a faithless husband has no reason to complain if his wife repays him in the same coin.

"My client went to work at once to regain the cabinet," continued Mr. Hornblower, plainly relieved that the thinnest ice had been crossed. "She found that it had been sold to Armand & Son. Hastening to their offices, she learned that it had been resold by them to Mr. Vantine and sent forward to him here. So she came over on the first boat, ostensibly to visit her family, but really to ask Mr. Vantine's permission to open the drawer and take out the letters. His death interfered with this, and in despair she came to me. I need hardly add that no member of her family knows anything about this matter, and it is especially important that her husband should never even suspect it. On her behalf I apply to you as Mr. Vantine's executor to restore these letters to their owner."

I sat for a moment turning this extraordinary story over in my mind. Surely Mme. X. would scarcely guard the secret of that drawer with poison.

"Does any one besides your client

know of the existence of these letters?" I asked at last.

"I think not," answered Mr. Hornblower, smiling dryly. "They are not of a nature which my client would care to communicate to any one. We must get them back at any cost."

"As a matter of fact," I pointed out, "there are always at least two people who know of the existence of every letter—the person who writes it and the person who receives it."

"I had thought of that, but the person who wrote these letters is dead. He was killed in a duel some months ago by Monsieur X."

Mr. Hornblower sat regarding me, his lips pursed, as an indication, perhaps, that he would say no more.

But there was no necessity that he should. I knew enough of French law and of French habits of thought to realize that if those letters ever came into possession of Monsieur X., the game would be entirely in his hands. His wife would be absolutely at his mercy. And the thought flashed through my mind that perhaps in some way he had learned of the existence of the letters, and was trying desperately to get them. That thought was enough to swing the balance in his wife's favor.

"I am sure," I said, "that Mr. Vantine would instantly have consented to your client opening the drawer and taking out the letters. And, as his executor, I also consent. But I must warn you, Mr. Hornblower, that I believe two men have already been killed trying to open that drawer, and I told him the story. 'I am inclined to think,' I concluded, 'that Vantine blundered upon the drawer while examining the cabinet, but there is no doubt that the other man knew of the drawer, and also, presumably, of its contents.'"

"Well," exclaimed my companion, "I have listened to many astonishing stories in my life, but never one to equal this. And you know nothing of this Frenchman?"

"Nothing except that he came from Havre on La Touraine last Thursday, and drove from the dock direct to Vantine's house."

"My client also came on La Touraine, but that, no doubt, was a mere coincidence."

"That may be," I agreed, "but it is scarcely a coincidence that both he and your client were after the contents of that drawer."

"You mean—"

"I mean that the mysterious Frenchman may very possibly have been an emissary of Monsieur X. Madame may have betrayed the secret to him in an unguarded moment."

Mr. Hornblower rose abruptly. He was evidently much disturbed.

"You may be right," he agreed. "I will communicate with my client at once. I take it that she has your permission to see the cabinet, and if it proves to be the right one that she may open the drawer and remove the letters."

"If she cares to take the risk," I assented.

CHAPTER IX. The Veiled Lady.

M R. HORNBLLOWER must have driven straight to her family residence on the avenue, or perhaps she was awaiting him at his office. At any rate, he called me up inside the half hour.

"My client would like to see the cabinet at once," he said. "She is in a very nervous condition, especially since she learned that some one else has tried to open the drawer. When will it be convenient for you to go with me?"

(To be Continued)

"My efforts to keep a diary convince me one thing."

"What's that?"

"That there are mighty few days in the year on which a man does anything really worth recording."—Detroit Free Press.

Private Sale of Valuable Personal Property.

Having decided to quit the road, building business on account of my other business taking all my time, I will offer at private sale at my home in Reesville, Ohio, the following personal property:

1 Aurora Stone Crusher, 10x15, with 25 foot elevator, and all necessary appurtenances,

1 Revolving Screen,

3 Stone Hoppers and Loaders for grading stone preparatory to building water bound macadam road,

1 24 inch Hoist,

150 feet of 5/8 cable,

3 Steel Cars,

Notice of Appointment.
Estate of George W. Barrere Sr., deceased.
Granville Barrere has been appointed and qualified as administrator of the estate of George W. Barrere Sr., late of Highland county, Ohio, deceased.
Dated this 16th day of January A. D. 1914.
J. B. WORKLEY,
Probate Judge of said County.

Notice of Appointment.
Estate of M. F. Carroll deceased.
J. E. Carroll has been appointed and qualified as administrator with the will annexed of the estate of M. F. Carroll late of Highland county, Ohio, deceased.
Dated this 9th day of February, A. D. 1914.
J. B. WORKLEY,
adv. Probate Judge of said County.

Teachers' Examination.
The Highland county Board of School Examiners hereby give notice that examinations of applicants for certificates will take place in the Washington School Building, Hillsboro, on the first Saturday of every month.
Patterson examinations will be held on the third Saturday of April and on the third Saturday of May.
As prescribed by law, the fee for teachers examinations will be 50 cents, while, for Patterson examinations no fee is charged.
O. A. TRENK, Sinking Spring, Pres.
adv. W. H. VANCE, Hillsboro, Vice Pres.
H. B. GALLIETTE, Lynchburg, Sec.

Legal Notice.
Notice is hereby given that a petition will be presented to the Commissioners of Highland County at their session to be held on March 16th, 1914, praying for the appointment of Road Commissioners to lay out and establish a Free Turnpike Road along the following line to-wit:
Beginning at the Hillsboro, Danville and Priceton turnpike, west of the residence of Frank Pount in Salem township, Highland County, Ohio, and in the center of a county road, thence with said county road as nearly as practicable, and in a southerly direction, passing the residences of C. C. Sanders, Alva Gossett and Matt Pulliam to the road known as the Salem and Clay township road near the residence of Nick Marconetti; thence with said road in an easterly and southerly direction passing the residences of J. J. Davidson and Wm. Custer to the old state road from Danville to Buford; thence with said state road a distance of about 10 rods to a county road intersecting said state road east of school lot district No. 3, Clay township; thence with said county road in a southerly direction to the Stratton and Buford Free Turnpike near the residence of P. Q. Fenner, a distance of about three and one fourth (3 1/4) miles, and being located in Salem, Clay and Whiteside townships, Highland County, Ohio. It is understood that all the taxpayers desiring to do so, may work out the taxes which may be assessed against them for the construction of said road at their option, at the prices paid for labor in building and construction of said road by the superintendent or other person in charge, and for the purpose of constructing said Free Turnpike Road, they will ask for the levy of an extra tax of 1 cent on the dollar for the period of twenty five years upon all the lands and taxable personal property within the limits of the said proposed Free Turnpike Road (under the one mile assessment-pike law), Section 6723 to 7231, inclusive, General Code of Ohio, unless the same be sooner completed and paid for.

WM. CUSTER AND OTHERS, Petitioners.

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Important change of time. Trains depart from Hillsboro as follows:

DAILY EXCEPT SUNDAY
8 a. m., 3:45 p. m., 6:30 p. m.

SUNDAY ONLY
8:20 a. m., 6:30 p. m.

Trains arrive in Hillsboro as follows:
DAILY EXCEPT SUNDAY
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